

Address by Admiral Stansfield Turner
Director of Central Intelligence
Navy League Dinner
New York City
Monday, 13 November 1978

It is nice to be back in the Navy family.

Admiral Moorer, thank you for those very kind words. It is really a great honor for me to be introduced by Admiral Moorer. All of us here recognize him as one of the most outstanding Naval officers, one of the most successful Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff this country has ever had. I was privileged to be selected for flag rank while Admiral Moorer was the Chief of Naval Operations. He always came and gave a lecture to the plebe admirals. I remember very well one of the strictures that he told us, a piece of advice that I have followed frequently.

He said, "Gentlemen, if you're ever going to have a press conference or appear in public where you will be under interrogation, always have three things in mind that you want to say. Then when you are asked that terrible question that you can't answer, you give them one of those three things regardless of what the question was."

I have never thanked Admiral Moorer for that advice and I have also never had the opportunity to tell him that that advice almost broke up my marriage. Before my first TV appearance, where I was expected to make remarks and then submit to questions, my wife and I were driving to the studio and I was rehearsing to myself out loud both my prepared remarks and the answers to the three Admiral Moorer questions. I didn't differentiate between them, so when the first question came, and my wife heard something that sounded like she had heard in the car, she was puzzled. When the second question came and again I gave a prerecorded, Admiral Moorer answer, she said, "This is rigged. My husband is a phony. The questions have all been predetermined." In fact, I could not answer the questions very well, so the Admiral's advice saved me. I want to thank Admiral Moorer now and to assure him that, despite that momentary loss of credibility, my marriage has stayed intact.

My marriage to the Navy has been a very happy one for me also. If there has been one disappointment in spending the last 20 months on detached duty as Director of Central Intelligence, it is not having been the same part of the Navy family. In fact, I have found that it was desirable not to participate in Navy events like this because I thought I should stick to my own last in intelligence.

But there was no way I could not be here tonight for this wonderful New York Navy League Dinner. First, because of my tremendous respect and affection for Rear Admiral Jack Bergen, for all he has done for all of us in the Navy and for our country. I know you join me in that appreciation.

And secondly, I do want to say, with great sincerity, that since becoming the Director of Central Intelligence, I have appreciated more than ever what organizations dedicated to the security of our country, like the Navy League, do for that security. In the last twelve months in the world of American intelligence, I have seen a turnaround in the public attitude towards our intelligence activities, in large measure as a result of the support of groups like the Navy League. While there will always be extremists who will criticize almost anything that the Central Intelligence Agency does, in recent months we have seen the responsible press, and the public in general, come to a renewed recognition that this country simply must know what is going on in the rest of the world and the only way to do that is to have a first-class intelligence service.

There is more to be done, however. There is still, in this country, inadequate recognition that to do the job of national security requires that we be able to keep some secrets. We are the most open society in the history of the world, and that is exactly the way we want it. But, if we are to prepare for possible inimical actions by other nations against us, we must be able to make some of those preparations in secret. We cannot afford to develop expensive weapon systems or complex devices for collecting intelligence and then give their detailed characteristics to other countries against whom we may find it necessary to employ them. They can be too easily countered in these circumstances. Nor can we afford as a nation to enter into negotiations for strategic arms limitations or other kinds of treaties if our negotiating positions are exposed in advance. Despite the obviousness of this, there is still too great an unwillingness today to recognize the legitimacy of secrets in our government. Let me give you a recent example.

In one of our major national newspapers one morning, there was a very interesting juxtaposition. In column four there was a story about an impending prosecution of two officials of ITT for alleged perjury in connection with events in Chile some years ago. The thrust of the story, however, was how bad it was that the Central Intelligence Agency might be impeding this prosecution because it refused to release certain secret documents. Over in column three was another story about a prosecution taking place in New Jersey--a prosecution for alleged murder--in which a newspaper reporter of the New York Times refused to disclose his notes and the defendant claimed those notes were necessary to prove his innocence. As you know, that case ended with the reporter going to jail for a while but he never disclosed his notes. These may seem different, but in fact, they are the same problem--the problem of protecting sources of information.

If newsmen or intelligence officers cannot protect the sources from which they receive information, those sources will disappear and information will disappear with them. The media in our country feel very strongly about protecting their confidential sources, but at the same time they are quick to criticize the Intelligence Community for wanting to do the same thing.

Let me assure you that, while I believe there must be some secrecy in government, at the same time I appreciate the fact that improper secrecy in government can be very dangerous. We must find ways to find that careful balance between a government that serves its people poorly because it keeps too many secrets that the people are not informed, and a government that serves its people poorly because it fails to keep those secrets which are necessary for the people's security. We as a nation must return to an understanding that there is a level of legitimate secrecy, even in our open society. No one can run a business, nor a newspaper, nor a government, without some privacy. And yet, we recognize that because intelligence is a risk-taking business; because the stakes are very high; because the wrong things could be kept secret for the wrong reasons, we must find ways to reassure the American public that secrecy, when it is used, is only used properly.

Out of the last several years of intense public criticism of the intelligence process, a new set of oversight mechanisms have been forged. In fact, a revolutionary step in our intelligence process has been the evolution of oversight, external to the intelligence community itself. Oversight is now the responsibility of both the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch.

The Intelligence Oversight Board in the Executive Branch has been in being for almost three years now. It is composed of former Senator Gore, former Governor Scranton, and Mr. Thomas Farmer of Washington. These three gentlemen have but one responsibility--to look into the legality and the propriety of the intelligence activities of this nation. They report only to one man, the President of the United States, but anyone may call to their attention what they believe to be abuses of the intelligence process.

Beyond this, in the Legislative Branch, we have had, for over two years in the Senate and just over a year in the House of Representatives, committees dedicated exclusively to the oversight of the intelligence process. These committees have established a cooperative and very helpful relationship with us in the intelligence community, but at the same time, I assure you it is a relationship of strict oversight and supervision. We are fully accountable to these committees and report to them regularly.

Any naval officer, particularly one who has commanded at sea, knows that accountability is an essential element of responsibility. I believe that the addition of accountability in intelligence through this oversight process, is making America's intelligence activities more responsible. We are more judicious to ensure that we look not only at the benefits of potential intelligence activities, but at the risks as well.

Now well you might ask me, "Are there not dangers in this?" Of course there are. Too much oversight could increase the probability that sensitive information will leak. Too much oversight could lead to

intelligence by timidity, which is no intelligence at all. So, we must find that proper balance here as well, between the benefits of accountability on one hand and the dangers of timidity on the other. That balance is being forged today in the Congress in what will be known as Legislative Charters for the Intelligence Community. I support this effort and hope for the passage of these charters by the Congress in its next session. First, because it will put intelligence activities on a sound, legal foundation. But beyond that, it will give to the intelligence officer on the street in a foreign country and to us in headquarters, guidelines and a better understanding of what is expected of us and what is not.

What does all this add up to today? I think it adds up to a very exciting, a very important, I might even suggest an historic time in American intelligence. We are crafting a new model of American intelligence. A model that is uniquely tailored to the standards and values of American society and will also ensure that we can retain the capability to be the best intelligence service in the world.

It will take several more years after the passage of charter legislation, for the relationships between the Intelligence Community and the various oversight processes to settle down and operate smoothly. I am confident we are moving in the right direction. We are moving toward a good balance of the problems, the risks of leaks, the risks of timidity on the one hand, and adequate assurance to the American public against abuse, on the other.

Throughout this process, the understanding and support of the American public will be essential. I depend upon you in the Navy League for part of that support. I know that you are dedicated first to a strong and effective Navy; but beyond that every one of you wants a strong, effective national security and that includes the Army, the Air Force, and your Intelligence Community. Through your example and your influence, I look for greater understanding on the part of the American public of these substantial changes and improvements that are taking place in our intelligence process in this country and of the importance of the job that we are trying to do. I sincerely believe today that we are the number one intelligence service in the world. With your understanding and support, we're going to stay there. Thank you.

NAVY LEAGUE DINNER
New York, N.Y.

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something that sounded like she'd heard it in the car before, she began to worry. And when the second question came and again I gave a pre-recorded Admiral Moorer answer to this question, she said, "This is rigged, my husband's a phony, the questions have all been predetermined." In fact, I couldn't answer the questions, so I took the Admiral's advice. Thanks anyway, Admiral Moorer, my marriage has stayed intact.

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There is still in this country inadequate recognition that to do the job of national security requires that we be able to keep some secrets. Now we are the most open society in the history of the world and that's exactly the way we want it. If we are going to be able to prepare for possible inimical actions by other nations against ours, we simply must be able to make some of those preparations in secret. We cannot afford to develop expensive weapon systems or complex devices for collecting intelligence and then give their detailed characteristic to other countries against whom we may find it necessary to employ them. They can be too easily countered in these circumstances. Nor can we afford as a nation to enter into negotiations for strategic arms limitations or other kinds of treaties if our negotiating positions are going to be exposed in advance. Despite the obviousness of this, there is, in my view, still too great an unwillingness today to recognize the legitimacy of secrets in our government. Let me give you a recent example.

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Out of the last several years of intense public criticism of the intelligence process in our country we have forged a new set of oversight mechanisms for that purpose. In fact, it is a very revolutionary step in our intelligence process that we have evolved a process of oversight, external to the intelligence community itself. Oversight both from within the Executive Branch and also from the Legislative Branch. In the Executive, we have an Intelligence Oversight Board which has been in being for almost three years now. It is composed today of former Senator Gore, former Governor Scranton, and Mr. Thomas Farmer of Washington. These three gentlemen have only one responsibility -- to look into the legality and the propriety of how we are conducting our intelligence activities as a nation. They report only to one man, the President of the United States, and anyone in the intelligence community or without may come and report to them what they believe are abuses of the intelligence process. But beyond this in the Legislative Branch, we have had, for over two years in the Senate and just over a year in

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What does all this add up to today? I think it adds up to a very exciting, a very important, I might even suggest an historic time in American intelligence. What we are doing is crafting a new model of American intelligence. A model that is uniquely tailored to the standards and values of American society and yet is also determined to ensure that we can retain the capability for being the best intelligence service in the world. We're not there yet. In my view it's going to take several more years--the passage of this legislation for charters, the settling down of the relationships between us in the Intelligence Community and the various oversight processes. I am confident we are moving in the right direction, we are moving to where we can balance the problems, the risks of leaks, the risks of timidity on the one hand, and the risks of not enough assurance to the American public against abuse, on the other. Throughout this process the support, the understanding of the American public is going to be essential; an understanding of this continuing importance of intelligence to our country today. I depend upon you in the Navy League for part of that support. I know that you are dedicated first to a strong and effective Navy; but beyond that every one of you wants a strong, effective national security and that includes the Army, the Air Force, and your Intelligence Community. Through your example and your influence, I look for greater understanding on the part of the American public of these substantial changes and improvements that are taking place in our intelligence process in this country and of the importance of the job that we are trying to do. I sincerely believe today that we are the number one intelligence service in the world. With your understanding and support, we're going to stay there. Thank you.

